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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/07/2019
TAGS: KNNP MNUC PARM IR AS
SUBJECT: SKEPTICAL AUSTRALIA SUPPORTS U.S. APPROACH ON IRAN

REF: A. STATE 103219
 B. CANBERRA 901

Classified By: Pol/Econ Counselor Edgard Kagan, Reasons 1.4(b)(d).

¶1. (C/NF) Australia fully supports U.S. efforts to engage with Iran but remains very skeptical of Iranian intentions. Patrick Suckling, First Assistant Secretary for International Affairs at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Andrea Faulkner, Assistant Secretary for South Asia, Middle East and Africa at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade both reacted positively to the P5 1 readout (Ref A), pledged support for the dual track approach and expressed Australia's deep official skepticism about Iran. Their comments echoed Foreign Minister Smith's statements before the P5 1 Geneva meeting that dialogue from Iran is a good start but not enough, and should the talks breakdown, Australia would contemplate further sanctions.

¶2. (C/NF) Faulkner said Australia was optimistically surprised by the Iranian interest in the Tehran Research Reactor proposal but added that "we have our eyes wide open," and wondered if Iran was not simply playing for time. Australia will attend the "like-minded" meeting hosted by State and Treasury to show support for the U.S. but also to gear up the bureaucracy for possible future sanctions, according to Faulkner. She noted that her boss, DFAT First Assistant Secretary for South Asia, Middle East and Africa Deborah Stokes had just left for Washington to participate in the meeting (Ref B). Driving the point more forcefully, Suckling focused on potential sanctions stating, "Australia wants the most robust, intrusive and debilitating sanctions possible." He concluded by reiterating the official skepticism but described Australia as "completely aligned" with the U.S. on Iran.

¶3. (C/NF) Comment: Australia appears to consider future sanctions inevitable, and is preparing the bureaucratic groundwork to support United Nations Security Council sanctions as well as further autonomous sanctions. End Comment.

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